

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The South Berkshire Youth Coalition of Community Health Programs has been chosen to receive a Federal Grant totaling \$625,000 to be paid over a five-year period. The grant, a *Drug Free Communities* grant, is sponsored by the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), both Federal agencies. It is exclusively for use in South County.

"We are thrilled that the youth of South County will benefit from this grant," said Marcia Savage, Executive Director of CHP. "These funds will enable the Coalition to play an integral, driving role in a community-wide approach to improve the environment in which young people live, grow up, go to school, and work. Our young people need clear and consistent messages about the risks of underage drinking and marijuana use, and they need to feel cared for and rewarded for their pro-social activities. We are thrilled to receive this significant grant to support the work of the Coalition."

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The Coalition will work to reduce drug and alcohol abuse in South County through preventative measures. "We aim to challenge community norms that encourage or are complicit towards drug and alcohol abuse, while creating new cultural norms that would encourage healthy alternatives to substance abuse," said Kathleen Jackson, Director of the South Berkshire Youth Coalition.

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In fact, the SBYC put these principles into action this past year when they organized an after-prom party for Monument Mountain Regional High School students at Bard College at Simon's Rock in Great Barrington. Instead of indulging in under-age drinking, close to 100 seniors and their dates played laser tag, swam in the college pool while a movie played, and had their palms read by a tarot card reader.

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Congressman John W. Olver said, "The South Berkshire Youth Coalition has been so successful because they understand that the entire community has a role to play in decreasing substance abuse. I am very pleased to hear that SBYC has been awarded this grant. Their work is incredibly valuable to the community, and this funding will further support their efforts."

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State Representative Smitty Pignatelli said, "The Southern Berkshire Youth Coalition has done fantastic work to prevent substance abuse in our area and these funds will aid in the continuation of that great work. I have, unfortunately, seen many young lives and the lives of

their families ruined by substance abuse; the damage too often too deep to overcome. Thankfully, there are groups such as the SBYC, working pro-actively at the forefront of this issue to ensure the kind of change these youths and families need; positive, lasting, change that generates real hope for the future."

With the funding in hand, the SBYC will be seeking input from community members as to how this money should be spent. A Coalition meeting will take place on October 2, 2008, at 8:30am at The Nutrition Center, 94 West Street in Great Barrington. Area residents are invited to attend.

"I encourage all those who want their voices heard to be present," said Jackson.

A Community Forum is scheduled for October 28

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at Berkshire South Regional Community Center located in Great Barrington on 15 Chrissey Road. The Forum will begin with a talk by Dr. Jennifer Michaels entitled, "How to Talk to your Youth about Drugs and Alcohol." Much of the forum will be dedicated to gathering community feedback about South County's priorities and what the community would like to see done with this grant. Again, all are encouraged to attend.

Jackson explained that the next few months will be spent developing a comprehensive five-year plan. She hopes that the entire community, and especially parents and teachers, will attend the October 28

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Forum in order to start hammering out a cohesive plan. She is in the process of producing brochures and other materials to support this new initiative.

"This is a community effort that will place higher expectations on our youth and challenge them to live up to their full potential. Everyone must be involved," said Jackson.

Interested parties are encouraged to call 413-528-1919, stop by the Southern Berkshire Youth Coalition at 94 West Street in Great Barrington, or email

sbycoalition@yahoo.com

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About the South Berkshire Youth Coalition (SBYC)

SBYC is a catalyst for collaboration on substance abuse prevention across all sectors of the south Berkshire community. Its mission is to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors in order to decrease alcohol and other drug use in southern Berkshire County in a long-term and sustainable manner. SBYC organizes open community meetings; sponsors prevention training sessions and informational forums; supports prevention initiatives run by schools, youth service organizations and others; and coordinates and provides evaluation of the regional Prevention Needs Assessment Survey in both local school districts. It utilizes evidence-based strategies for all elementary and middle school-aged children to prevent and/or delay the onset of alcohol and other drug use; enhance pro-social relationships between youth and adults; improve family management practices; enhance youth empowerment efforts; and foster increased collaboration within the South Berkshire community among all 12 sectors on prevention and other community issues. With over 100 business, organization, and individual memberships, SBYC continues to expand its reach across the community.

About CHP

CHP's mission is to provide the best quality health care possible for all the people they serve and to improve the health status of the community by doing so. The agency is built on the belief that all people should be entitled to the same high-quality health care and related services, whether they can afford to pay for care or not. CHP services over 6,000 individuals annually through the CHP Health Center; CHP WIC (Women, Infants and Children) Program; CHP First Steps early intervention program; the CHP Family Network/Family Center; HCAP (Healthy Communities Access Program), a mobile outreach treatment team; Barrington OB/GYN; the CHP Dental Center; the South Berkshire Youth Coalition; and the Neighborhood Health Center in Pittsfield.

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